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Amando Basurto

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Hannah Arendt's Kantian Socrates: Moral and Political Judging*

*Amando Basurto***

Abstract

The central claim in this essay is that Hannah Arendt advanced two different concepts of judgment: The first is moral and it is her Socratic reinterpretation of Kant's «categorical imperative»; the second is political and it represents her Socratic adaptation of Kant's «enlarged mentality». I show that Arendt's concepts of judgment runs on two different trains of thought throughout her work. One train branches out of her characterization of Adolf Eichmann as a thoughtless being, and it mostly consists of both her exploration of the possible relation between thinking and morality and her quest for an autonomous source of morality. In this first case, Arendt reframes Kant's categorical imperative in Socratic terms by revealing a principle of non-imperative self-respect. The second train of thought is less contingent; it stems out of Arendt's realization that recovering plurality and the world in-between men would require more than just the phenomenological recovery of political action, it requires the recovery of the public and equi-vocal manifestation of thought. In this other case, Arendt suggests a reevaluation of the Socratic phronimos by way of the Kantian notions of sensus communis and enlarged mentality. The result is her concept of Judging.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt. Judging. Political Judgment. Socrates. Kant.

Hannah Arendt's work has the great value of providing insights into the political consequences of the modern technicization of human affairs. Indeed, flowing steadily throughout her oeuvre is an undercurrent of attempts to recover an authentically political experience, a loss men have suffered in their modern surrender to necessity. Arendt's political thought is anchored in two central, unique concepts: action and judging. No doubt, action is the central category in her political theory; for her, rescuing human affairs, especially politics, from world-alienation and consumption depends on reclaiming the distinction between it labor and work. Arendt's concept of judging, however, is elusive because it appears in scattered references throughout her work and remains unfinished.

Unlike scholars who tend to refer and analyze Arendt's concept of «judging» as if it was uniform, I claim that Hannah Arendt advanced two different concepts of judgment that have to be examined in their specificity. The first is her

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** State University of New York (FIT), *amandobasurto@newschool.edu.*

Socratic reinterpretation of Kant's «categorical imperative», which is moral; the second represents her Socratic adaptation of Kant's «enlarged mentality» which results in the notion of political judging. Failing to understand and uphold the difference between these two forms of judgment has lead commentators and critics to obscure the peculiarity of the political that is central for the form of active citizenship that recognizes the common world at its *inter-est* that Arendt proposes[1]. In contrast, Upholding Arendt's distinction allows a better understanding of how her attempt to recover political action (active citizenship) entails limiting the role of morality in public affairs at the same time it suggests a new ethical position in relation to both the world and those who dwell in it.

In this essay, I will show that Arendt's concepts of judgment run on two different *trains of thought* throughout her work. One train branches out of her characterization of Adolf Eichmann as a thoughtless being, and it mostly consists of both her exploration of the possible relation between thinking and morality and her quest for an autonomous source of morality. In this first case, Arendt reframes Kant's categorical imperative in Socratic terms by revealing a principle of *non-imperative self-respect*. The second train of thought is less contingent; it stems out of Arendt's realization that recovering plurality and the world in-between men would require more than just the phenomenological recovery of political action, it requires the recovery of the *public* and *equi-vocal* manifestation of thought. In this other case, Arendt suggests a reevaluation of the Socratic *phronimos* by way of the Kantian notion of *sensus communis*.

1. Moral judgment and the principle of *non-imperative self-respect*

Hannah Arendt attended Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1961 and worked on a report for *The New Yorker* during 1962. She published the report the following year both as a series of articles and as a book. The reference to Adolf Eichmann's inability to think, which Arendt incorporates in her report of the trial, is superficial at most[2]. In brief, Arendt's claim is that thoughtlessness —which is manifest in Eichmann's intensive use of bureaucratic jargon and

[1] For example, Jenniffer Nedelsky's interpretation of the social conception of the autonomy of judgment as fundamental for optimizing judiciary judging overstrains and misapprehends the particularity of Arendt's notions of moral and political judgments; Albrecht Wellmer supposes that Arendt attempted to «assimilate political and moral judgment, structurally speaking, to aesthetic judgment in the Kantian sense»; from a different perspective, while trying to explain why taste is the sense from which (political) judging is derived, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl turns to the element of disgust in Kant's moral philosophy and misinterprets Arendt's recovery of the notion of «sociability» as directed towards a possible consideration of «how we experience the solidarity of mankind»; and Bryan Garsten confuses the distinctive foundations of moral and political judgments when he claims that, for Arendt «the intersubjective point of view grounds moral judgments that are not based on a definite set of reasons or rules and yet are also not inscrutable to others». See Nedelsky and Wellmer's chapters in Beiner and Nedelsky, 2001: 103-120, 165-181, Young-Bruehl, 1982: 299, Benhabib, 2010: 328.

[2] This is the only reference to Eichmann's inability to think in Arendt report: «The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality itself», Arendt, 1964.

clichés, and in his inability to think from the standpoint of someone else— could «wreak more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together»[3]. As a consequence of the controversy produced by her report on Eichmann's trial, Arendt wrote and lectured on the topic of morality for several years. Notwithstanding the frequent interruptions occasioned by her intense lecturing and her husband's long convalescence[4], Arendt made a long and sustained effort to understand the relation between morality and the activity of thinking.

Later in her work, as she goes further in her explorations of morality, Arendt will turn from analyzing the relation between thoughtlessness and the «banality of evil» towards analyzing thoughtlessness as an indication of conscience deficiency[5]. In so doing, I will show, she travels back to Socrates via Kant. The outcome, paradoxically, is a shift of emphasis from the relation between thinking (as a dialogue between one and one's self) and morality, to the relation between conscience (as self-cross-examination) and morality. As we will see, Arendt's explorations on the relation between thinking and morality develop into a quest for an autonomous source of morality that could survive both the muting of the *voice of God* and the increasing relativity of *mores*[6]. Such autonomous source of morality is rooted in her Socratic adaptation of Kant's categorical imperative in the form of *non-imperative self-respect*.

1.1. *Personal responsibility and independent judgment*

The starting point of Arendt's work on morality is the distinction she draws between guilt and responsibility in «Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship». In this piece she explains how those who refused to collaborate with the Nazi regime retained their capacity for independent judgment and hence escaped the consequences of the collapse of morality that permeated «respectable» German society. Her distinction between guilt and responsibility echoes her critique of Karl Jaspers' *Question of German Guilt*[7]. Arendt insists that «there is

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[3] Arendt does not make any generalizations out of Eichmann's apparent inability to think in the main body of her report on the trial. This changes, however, when she explains (although not necessarily in a satisfactory manner) the notion of banality of evil and its relation to thoughtlessness in the «Postscript» she adds to the 1964 edition of the book.

[4] See (Young-Bruehl, 2004: 389-397).

[5] Her explorations are at the center of the courses on moral philosophy she taught at the New School for Social Research (*Some questions on moral philosophy*, 1965) and at the University of Chicago (*Basic Moral Propositions* and *Kant's moral philosophy*, 1966), and would reach its most elaborated form in her 1971 lecture on «Thinking and Moral Considerations».

[6] In her notes for her lecture *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy* given at The New School for Social Research in 1965, Arendt writes: «[A]t the moment morality collapsed... no one was any longer afraid of an avenging God or, more concretely speaking, of possible punishments in a hereafter». «All we know is that hardly anyone thought these old beliefs fit for public justification». «That ours is the first generation... in which the masses... no longer believe in "future states"... and who therefore are committed... [t]o think of conscience as an organ that will react without hope for rewards and without fear of punishment. Whether people still believe that this conscience is informed by some divine voice is, to say the very least, open to doubt» (Arendt, 2003: 63, 64, 89).

[7] Arendt's rather pungent critique of Jaspers' notion of *German guilt* appears in her correspondence with her husband, Heinrich Blücher: «Jaspers' guilt-monograph despite all its beauty and noble-

not such a thing as collective guilt or collective innocence; guilt and innocence makes sense only if applied to individuals»; unlike political responsibility, which «every government assumes for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessor and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past», guilt is *strictly individual*[8].

This distinction is critical to understanding that —as Arendt claimed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*— those who participated in and collaborated with the Nazi government were not simply cogs, dispensable parts in the large machinery of the Third Reich. Collaborators' and participants' individual responsibility cannot be buried under the claim that «every organization demands obedience to superiors as well as obedience to the laws of the land», which implicitly denies «the human faculty of judgment». Individual responsibility, Arendt argues, cannot be shifted «from man to system»[9].

This stress on personal responsibility also informs Arendt's argument concerning those who refrained from collaborating with the Nazis; for assuming collective guilt would simply disregard the significance of such individual decisions. She emphasizes that nonparticipation can and did occur even in the context of a total moral collapse, and that this was hardly the result of observing the old system of values and standards. Instead, nonparticipants, unlike those who collaborated, «asked themselves to what extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after committing certain deeds... they refused to murder, not so much because they still held fast to the command "Thou shall not kill", but because they were unwilling to live with a murderer —themselves—»[10]. The central question for Arendt thus becomes: «How can you think, and even more important in our context, *how can you judge without holding on to preconceived standards, norms, and general rules under which the particular cases and instances can be subsumed*?»[11].

In its simplest form, Arendt's argument is this: Unlike those who supported Nazism and «h[e]ld fast to [prevailing] moral norms and standards», nonparticipants were: a) unwilling to «live with [themselves as] a murderer» and b) accustomed to *examining things* and «to mak[ing] up their minds». Nonparticipants were the only ones, Arendt claims, «who dared to judge by themselves... [They] were those whose consciences did not function in this, as it were, automatic way... Their criterion, I think, was a different one: *they asked themselves to what*

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mindedness, is an anathematized and Hegelized, Christian/pietistic/hypocritical nationalizing piece of twaddle...» (Arendt and Blücher, 2000: 1985-1986).

[8] The fallacy of the concept of collective guilt, Arendt explains, is that its admission results in «a very effective, though unintended, whitewash of *those* who had done something... where all are guilty, no one is» (Arendt, 2003: 28-30, 43). See also Arendt, 2003: 147-158.

[9] Arendt, 2003: 32, 41, 42-43, 46. The emphasis on personal responsibility is consistent throughout Arendt's writings. See Arendt, 2003: 148, 158.

[10] Arendt, 2003: 44. Richard Bernstein has raised questions about the limits of Arendt's interpretation of Eichmann's motives: «I think that Arendt tends to overstate her case about Eichmann. Ironically, she was always deeply skeptical about the ability to penetrate the "darkness of one's heart", to say with confidence what one's own or another's "real" motives are». The same question can be raised here as to just how Arendt knew that every nonparticipant was «unwilling to live with a murderer» and was not holding past to old values and standards (Bernstein, 1996: 170).

[11] Arendt, 2003: 26, my emphasis.

extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after committing certain deeds»[12].

Arendt is looking to turn, thus, the *self* into the central agent of morality. In order to eschew modern relativism and volatility of *mores* Arendt makes morality *self*-referential, which makes the relation between one and *one's self* more important, in moral terms, than the relation between oneself and either other men or the world. For Arendt, the moral censure of murder is not a matter of safeguarding «life» but of safeguarding the relation with one's self. The relationship with *one's self,* she argues, is a higher good than *life* itself: one should not kill, not because of the harm it will inflict on another, but because one is unwilling to live with one's self as a murderer[13].

Unlike «independent thinking»[14], «independent judgment» does not aim to question truths, but to discern what is morally right from what is morally wrong *without* applying any standards (regardless of whether moral standards have been «shaken» either by thinking or by a drastic change of mores)[15]. This supports her argument against collective guilt and makes space for the claim that individuals are able to make autonomous moral decisions —which would prove that they are responsible for their actions regardless of their motives (or lack thereof). Arendt thus embarks on the search for the principles that regulate moral action within the autonomy of the *self*.

1.2. *The Socratic deconstruction of the Kantian categorical imperative*

The basic claim at the center of Arendt's explorations on morality is that moral philosophy had been at an *impasse* since Socrates until Kant appeared on the scene[16]. During this time, morality was distorted into a matter of imposing transcendent yardsticks and measurements à la Plato. Arendt's main claim is that moral teaching should not be pronounced as absolute commands of divine origin[17].

Arendt finds a renewed, modern, and rationalistic argument for the autonomy of the self in Kant's moral philosophy. According to her, Kant reclaims moral philosophy as a «"strictly" human affair» in which «moral conduct... seems to depend primarily upon the intercourse of man with himself». In this sense, the categorical imperative works as a rationalized operation of non-self-contradiction that emphasizes one's moral autonomy; morality, for Kant, «is *not a matter of concern with the other but with the self*, not of meekness but of human dignity

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[12] Arendt, 2003: 44, 45, my emphasis.

[13] In the same vein, Arendt writes in «Collective Responsibility»: If it is a question of killing, «the argument would not be that the world would be better off without the murder being done, but the unwillingness to live with an assassin». Arendt, 2003: 51, 156.

[14] See *Selbstdenken* in Arendt, 1968: 8-10.

[15] Arendt's work on morality unfortunately suffers from the lack of a clear distinction between these two mental activities. See Bernstein, 1996: 172, 173; Arendt, 2003: 131.

[16] Arendt, 2003: 67.

[17] Arendt, 2003: 51, 64-65.

and even human pride. The standard is neither the love of some neighbor nor self-love, but self-respect»[18].

Arendt uses Kant's categorical imperative to reinforce both the self's centrality and autonomy in moral matters with the argument that morality is the result of a rational process and not a specific form of applicable knowledge. However, she finds the limit of Kantian moral philosophy in the *imperativeness* of the categorical[19]. In Kantian terms, obeying the categorical imperative means «that I am obeying my own reason, and the law which I give myself is valid for all rational creatures». In other words, ones' *will* has to yield to one's *reason*, which is why «Kant, knowing that the will —this faculty unknown to antiquity— can say no to reason, felt it necessary to introduce an *obligation*». This sense of obligation, however, is exactly what Arendt eschews. She is looking for a notion of morality that is *not* formulated in imperative form, that is, for a moral source that has «nothing to do with obedience to any law that is given from the outside —be it the law of God or the laws of men»[20]. This is why Arendt turns to Socrates in search of the exemplary «moral man».

Arendt focuses on the paradoxical proposition that Socrates pronounces in *Gorgias*: «It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong»[21]. She claims that this proposition presupposes yet another, namely that: «It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict me»[22]. Arendt combines both propositions in one:

> *Even though I am one, I am not simply one, I have a self and I am related to this self as my own self. This self is by no means an illusion; it makes itself heard by talking to me —I talk to myself, I am not only aware of myself— and in this sense, though I am one, I am two-in-one and there can be harmony or disharmony with the self. If I disagree with other people, I can walk away; but I cannot walk away from myself... if I do wrong I am condemned to live together with a wrongdoer in an unbearable intimacy*[23].

As with Kant, the Socratic moral act requires no *special organ* «because you remain within yourself and no transcendent standard... informs you of right and wrong». But even more importantly, the Socratic proposition, unlike the limitations of Kantian moral philosophy, implies neither commandments nor obligations. It simply declares: «[I]t is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong, and not: Thou shalt suffer wrong rather than do it»[24].

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[18] Arendt, 2003: 62-63, 66, 67.

[19] «The real imperative underlying the categorical imperative is: don't contradict yourself. And this is clearly the basic law of thinking, or a *command* of reason» (Young-Bruehl, 2004: 366, my emphasis).

[20] Kant felt the need «to give his rational proposition an obligatory character». For him, Good Will is the «will that when told "Thou shalt" will answer, "Yes, I will"». This is how Kant «introduced the form of the imperative and brought back the concept of obedience, through a back door as it were». Arendt, 2003: 68, 69, 72, 77, my emphasis.

[21] Arendt, 2003: 82.

[22] Arendt quotes this proposition later, in Arendt, 2003: 181.

[23] Arendt, 2003: 90, my emphasis.

[24] It is in this respect that Arendt claims that nonparticipators «did not feel an obligation but acted according to something which was self-evident to them even though it was no longer self-evident to

Arendt thus reclaims the Kantian reinforcement of both the self's centrality and autonomy in order to remodel the categorical imperative in Socratic terms. By returning to Socrates via Kant, she uncovers the principle of *non-imperative self-respect*, finding therein an independent and subjective source of morality.

This principle is further elaborated at the end of «Thinking and Moral Considerations», a lecture Arendt gave in 1971. Here Arendt confirms that the autonomous source of morality she has been looking for is *not* thinking but something at the core of its «*very performance*»[25]. She thus redirects her gaze towards *consciousness* and *conscience*:

In the last section of «Thinking and Moral Considerations» Arendt recurs again to the two *positive* Socratic propositions in *Gorgias*[26]. Arendt explains that the first proposition is «a subjective statement», which declares that «it is better *for me* to suffer wrong than to do wrong». The proposition therefore refers to man as *man* and not as citizen because the concern is with the self and not with the world. The second proposition points to a difference «inserted into my *Oneness*» despite the fact that I appear as *one* to others. This difference in one's self is *consciousness*, that is, «the curious fact that in a sense I also am for myself, though I hardly appear to me»[27]. The very possibility of self-harmony or contradiction presupposes that the individual is conscious of her self.

From these two positive Socratic propositions, Arendt derives a moral principle: «It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong because you can remain the friend of a sufferer; who would want to be the friend of or have to live together with a murderer? Not even a murderer». In short, the fear to living with one's self as a wrongdoer is also a manifestation of the difference in one's Oneness[28], and the moral limit of one's action is, in this sense, *one's unwillingness to live with a wrongdoer.*

This is rendered explicit in the passages that Arendt quotes as examples —from *Richard III* and from *Hippias Major*. Richard III fears his conscience, which «appears as an afterthought, that thought that is aroused by... a crime»;

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those around them. Hence their conscience, if that was what it was, had no obligatory character, it said, "This I *can't* do", rather than "This I *ought* not to do"» (Arendt, 2003: 91, 77, 79).

[25] «We are left with the conclusion that only people filled with this eros, this desiring love of wisdom, beauty and justice, are capable of thought —that is we are left with Plato's «noble nature» as a prerequisite for thinking. And *this was precisely what we were not looking for* when we raised the question whether the thinking activity, *the very performance itself* —as distinguished from and regardless of whatever qualities a man's nature, his soul, may posses— conditions him in such a way that he is incapable of evil». (Arendt, 2003: 180, my emphasis) Arendt writes something similar in *Thinking*: «It looks as though Socrates had nothing more to say about the connection between evil and lack of thought than that people who are not in love of beauty, justice, and wisdom are incapable of thought, just as, conversely, those who are in love with examining and thus «do philosophy» would be incapable of doing evil». (Arendt, 1981: 179).

[26] The distinction between the Socratic «desiring love of wisdom» and «consciousness» is easy to miss. This explains why George Kateb claims that in Arendt's exploration on morality «Socrates is one kind of absolutely good man» and that his two propositions serve as «the basis for Socratic moral absolutism.» (Kateb, 1984: 37).

[27] Arendt, 2003: 182, 183, 184.

[28] Conscience is no more «supposed to tell us what to do and what to repent of; it was the voice of God before it became the *lumen naturale* or Kant's practical reason». Arendt, 2003: 185, 186.

whereas in the case of Socrates, conscience appears as an afterthought aroused «by unexamined opinions»[29]. Both Richard III and Socrates feel *remorse* when in solitude, the former as a consequence of his «hateful deeds», the latter as a consequence of neglecting to ponder his opinions. In these two cases, however, conscience is an afterthought, that is, it appears *after* the deed.

The only time conscience is depicted as having the potential to *prevent* evil is found in an example Arendt mentions in passing only: «as the *anticipated fear of such afterthoughts*... [in] the hired murderers in *Richard III*»[30]. Arendt's reference is to the dialogue between the two murderers who, in the play, are about to kill the Duke of Clarence:

> *SECOND MURDERER. What, shall I stab him as he sleeps?*
> *FIRST MURDERER. No; he'll say 'twas done cowardly, when he wakes.*
> *SECOND MURDERER. Why, he shall never wake until the great judgment-day.*
> *FIRST MURDERER. Why, then he'll say we stabb'd him sleeping.*
> *SECOND MURDERER. The urging of that word judgment hath bred a kind of remorse in me.*
> *FIRST MURDERER. What, art thou afraid?*
> *SECOND MURDERER. Not to kill him, having a warrant; but to be damn'd for killing him, from which no warrant can defend me.*
> *FIRST MURDERER. I thought thou hadst been resolute.*
> *SECOND MURDERER. So I am, to let him live.*
> *FIRST MURDERER. I'll back to the Duke of Gloucester and tell him so.*
> *SECOND MURDERER. Nay, I prithee, stay a little. I hope this passionate humour of mine will change; it was wont to hold me but while one tells twenty.*
> *FIRST MURDERER. How dost thou feel thyself now?*
> *SECOND MURDERER. Faith, some certain dregs of conscience are yet within me.*

Arendt concludes that «what makes a man *fear this conscience* is the anticipation of the presence of a witness who awaits him only *if* and when he goes home», that is, the *anticipation of* the most subjective consequence of wrongdoing: *remorse*[31]. This is why Arendt's claim that «the nonwicked everybody who has no special motives and for this reason is capable of infinite evil... never meets his midnight disaster»[32], literally means that such a wrongdoer is never afraid of feeling guilt[33]. *Thinking*, being the manifestation of the dialogue between one and one's self, functions here as the *symptom* that makes the two-in-one partition

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[29] Arendt, 2003: 186, 187.

[30] Arendt, 2003: 187, my emphasis.

[31] Seyla Benhabib is mistaken when she claims that Arendt «described conscience as the harmony or oneness of the soul with itself» for, as shown above, Arendt describes conscience as the «cross examination» of one's self. See Benhabib, 1988: 44.

[32] Arendt, 2003: 188, my emphasis.

[33] This is how Arendt refers to non being afraid of feeling guilt in *The Life of the Mind*: «A person who does not know that silent intercourse (in which we examine what we say and what we do) will not mind contradicting himself, and this means he will never be either able or willing to account for what he says or does; nor will he mind committing any crime, since he can count on its being forgotten the next moment. Bad people —Aristotle to the contrary notwithstanding— are *not* "full of regrets"» (Arendt, 1981: 191).

manifest. It is not that thinking is «essential for the formation of conscience», but that is indicative of the very existence of such a «witness», that is, the possibility of conscience[34].

Arendt's quest for an autonomous source of morality thus comes to a close by anchoring moral judgment in the fear of remorse, or as George Kateb calls it: «a way of *avoiding torment*»[35]. This reflects two things that Arendt found in the relation between thinking and morality. First, Arendt found that thinking could liberate «independent [moral] judgment» from the tethers of compulsory religious or rationalistic will by rendering it an expression of self-respect. The second thing she found is not, strictly speaking, something *in* the relation between thinking and morality but, rather, a symptom of *nonthinking*. Whereas the «wind of thought» is the manifestation of conscience in the form of a friendly relationship between one and one's self, *thoughtlessness* indicates the nonoccurrence of a retreat into a situation of solitude where one could be «cross-examined» by one's *self*. Arendt's claim is that a thoughtless individual, such as Eichmann, is unafraid of remorse because he does not anticipate having to live with the shame, for instance, of facilitating the murder of thousands of individuals.

Whereas Arendt's first finding about «independent judgment» seems to require a certain boldness to challenge established criteria and values, in the second, the making of a moral decision is motivated by the fear of living with one's self as a wrongdoer under relentless cross-examination[36]. Here, the moral act of refraining from wrongdoing depends on fear of remorse in the form of *conscience*, which is the constant cross-examination of one's self[37].

Arendt's objective is not to provide a post-Kantian moral principle. Her aim is to provide the groundwork for understanding personal responsibility in cases in which moral frameworks have collapsed, which allows her to explain both the motiveless criminality of Adolph Eichmann and the ultimate moral resort of noncollaborators. Sure, her explorations on morality are plagued with shortcomings that are out of the scope of this essay. Notwithstanding, my claim is that Arendt's notion of moral judgment —whose principle is a *non-imperative self-respect* that is manifest in the anticipation «of a witness who awaits [one] only *if* and when [one] goes home»— is fundamentally different from political judging which, as will see in the second part of this essay, is the foundation for a truthful dialogue in which everyone engaged can understand the truth in the other's opinion by understanding how and in what specific manner the common world appears to the other. As moral judging's main concern is the *self* and not the *world* it is not, and should never be, the foundation of politics.

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[34] Cfr. Richard J. Bernstein in Villa, 2000: 281.

[35] As Arendt puts it more simply in her essay *Crisis of the Republic*: «The *fear* of being alone and having to face oneself can be a very effective dissuader from wrongdoing». Arendt, 1972: 67, Kateb, 1984: 37.

[36] In «Philosophy and Politics», Arendt poses the frightening consequences of committing evil as follows: «[A] murderer is not only condemned to the permanent company of his own murderous self, but he will see all other people in the image of his own action. He will live in a world of potential murderers» (Arendt, 2004: 440).

[37] Arendt tends to blur the distinction between thinking and conscience. See Arendt, 2003: 101, 189.

2. Political judging and the friendly equivocality of opinion

In stark contrast to the image of Socrates as an exemplary «moral man» that Arendt presents throughout her studies on the possible relation between thinking and morality, an ideal type of Socrates as *phronimos* («understanding man») stands at the center of her explorations on the political significance of thinking. This latter version of Socrates is present in Arendt's consistent attempt to place the practice of public articulation of opinion (*doxa*) at the epicenter of her political concept of understanding (*Verstehen*).

This singular approach to Socrates is inscribed in Arendt's critique to the Western political tradition[38]. Arendt reached into pre-Platonic political experience in order to recover a notion of politics that existed in a context in which action had not been substituted by making, and thought and action had not parted company; that is, in a context where politics was not subjugated under the rule or supremacy of philosophical thought and standards. Arendt finds in Socratic *maieutics* the most genuine expression of a political experience that acknowledges the value of opinion (*doxa*) by requiring the *critical* and *equivocal* positioning of all the participating individuals. The standard that Arendt intends to recover is «*phronēsis*, the insight of the political man»[39].

Throughout her explorations on the political significance of thinking, Arendt places Socrates' public articulation of opinion (*doxa*[40]) at the epicenter of her concept of understanding (*Verstehen*). Her main objective is to provide the foundation for authentic political action and speech: understanding the others' points of view from the vulnerable and inconclusive position of «*it appears to me*». As I explain below, Arendt's exemplary reinterpretation of Socrates as «*phronimos*» is not enough to explain how is it possible for an individual to make *public* a *contestable* opinion that is *not strictly subjective*. The fundamental question that Arendt faces is: What precisely does this vocalization of opinion —in the form of an «it seems to me» that is not private— presuppose? Arendt's reinterpretation of Socrates as «*phronimos*» requires, thus, explaining how is that *opinion* is able to «override its subjective private conditions». For this reason Arendt resorts to Kant's concept of *sensus-communis* —which is the centerpiece of his notion of reflective judgment. As we will see, Arendt looks into Kant's notion of *general agreeability* for the groundwork for the contemporary recovery of the *publicity* and *contestability* of political action and speech (which explains why she turned her concept of understanding (*Verstehen*) into judging).

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[38] Arendt realized that, since its foundation, philosophy has been at odds with both politics and the public sphere for it was established through an act of fear and distrust of both *opinion* and *plurality*. She also concluded that the foundation of the Western philosophical tradition had yet another political consequence: the transposition into public space of relations of rulership, which had traditionally been confined to private life. Arendt criticizes, thus, the experiential impact of the devaluation of politics by tracking its transformation from a relation inter pares into a relation between rulers and ruled. Arendt, 2005: 130-131). See also Arendt, 1998: 220-230, 2007b, 2007a.

[39] Arendt, 2005: 168.

[40] «To Socrates, as to his fellow citizens, *doxa* was the formulation in speech of what *dokei moi*, that is, "of what appears to me"» (Arendt, 2005: 14).

2.1. *Socratic understanding*

Arendt's political interpretation of Socrates' maieutics and her concept of understanding are initially developed in both the lecture series on «Philosophy and Politics» that she gave at the University of Notre Dame in 1954[41] and an article published the same year in *Partisan Review* under the title «Understanding and Politics»[42]. In these instances, Arendt puts forward the concept of understanding (*Verstehen*) as a fundamental condition for authentic politics with the objective of recuperating the centrality of *opinion* and *persuasion* along with a fundamentally intersubjective notion of the world.

In her lectures Arendt depicts Socrates not as a «philosopher» (*sophos*) but as an «understanding man» (*phronimos*). She makes clear that unlike the former, who has no place in the public realm of the *polis*, the latter is an active citizen that does not aspire to rule[43]. In Arendt's quest for a figure to contrast against both the *professional thinker* and the *professional politician*, Socrates comes to represent the public articulator of *doxa* who engages in dialogues with his fellow citizens about the common world. Arendt characterizes Socratic *maieutic* as «the art of midwifery: he wanted to help others give birth to what they themselves thought anyhow, to find their truth in their *doxa*». Unlike Plato, she claims, Socrates regarded *dialegesthai* and *rhétoriké* as forms of persuasion that resulted in opinion (*doxa*). In Arendt's interpretation, Socrates' «maieutic was a political activity, a give and take, fundamentally on a basis of strict equality»[44].

The political character of maieutics lies not in its pedagogical implementation or in its publicity. Socrates did not simply engage in friendly dialogues with his fellow citizens; instead, she emphasizes, maieutic dialogue *is* the *method of* «*mak[ing] friends out of Athens' citizenry*». The political element in maieutics is, thus, that it is a «*truthful dialogue* [in which] *each of the friends can understand the truth in the other's opinion*. More than his friend as a person, one friend understands how and in what *specific articulateness the common world appears to the other*, who as a person is forever unequal or different»[45].

How is friendship related to understanding how the common world appears to the different and unequal other? Arendt claims that authentic political action/speech requires the *equivocal* position that is only possible among friends (*philia*). This argument resembles a secular rendition of Arendt's interpretation of Saint Augustine's «*neighborly love*». Let's recall the central characterization of *brotherly* (*neighborly*) *love* in Arendt's doctoral dissertation:

> *We can meet the other only because both of us belong to the human race, it is only in the individual's isolation in God's presence that he becomes our neighbor.*

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[41] Jerome Kohn published a «slightly different» version under the title *Socrates* in *The Promise of Politics*.

[42] The article was published in Partisan Review, XX/4 1954, although the version used here is the one edited by Jerome Kohn. For details see Arendt, 1994: xix.

[43] Arendt, 2004: 429.

[44] Arendt, 2005: 15. Arendt, thus, finds in Socrates the epitome of political experience in which thought and action are performed simultaneously. Arendt, 2004: 434.

[45] Arendt, 2005: 16, 17-18, my emphasis.

> *By virtue of this isolation in God's presence, the other is lifted out of the self-evident dependence in which all people live with each other, and then our connection with him is subject to the explicit obligation of kinship*[46].

The political/secular twist in Arendt's interpretation of *neighborly love* becomes all the more notable if we paraphrase the quotation: *We can meet the other only because we both belong to the human race. It is only through dialogue in the presence of the common world that we can become friends [fellow citizens]. By virtue of his presence in the common world, the other is lifted out of the self-evident inequality in which all people live, and then our connection with him becomes subject to the explicit friendly obligation to understand how the common world appears to each other*. What seems to be a secular reinterpretation of Augustine's *caritas*, translates *friendship* into a relationship based on the *equivocality* necessary for understanding how the common world appears to others from a position of it-appears-to-me[47]. This position is only possible among friends, not because there is no need of justice among friends (as in Aristotle), but because only among friends one can assume the vulnerable position of «*it appears to me*», rather than the uncompromising (and unfriendly) position of «*I know*».

Participating in politics is, in this sense, a mutual understanding of perspectives among friends. For it is only from this vulnerable position of «*it appears to me*» that one can come to persuade the others by *understanding* their point of view. Understanding requires, Arendt explains, «*for each citizen to be articulate enough to show his opinion in its truthfulness and therefore to understand his fellow citizens*»[48].

Arendt's concept of understanding (*Verstehen*) is fundamentally different from both *Vernunft* and *Verstand* —which she insists in translating as *reason* and *intellect*— because it is not a matter of logical consistency and its fruits «could not be measured by the result of arriving at this or that general truth»[49]. Understanding the others' points of view from the vulnerable and inconclusive position of «*it appears to me*», as the essential experience in Socratic maieutics, is thus the exemplary exercise of recognizing the plurality of men and their opinions; it is, in this respect, the foundation of authentic political action/speech.

2.2. *Kant's sensus-communis*

Arendt knew that recovering the political significance of the Socratic *friendly* exercise of persuading from a position of «it appears to me» requires being grounded in a *sense* more common that the one shared by those filled with the «desiring love of wisdom» (philosophers). Understanding the others' points of view from a (friendly) equivocal position requires a shared sense from which

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[46] Arendt *et al.,* 1996: 112.
[47] Arendt, 2005: 14.
[48] Arendt, 2005: 18, my emphasis.
[49] «It is therefore obvious still quite in the Socratic tradition that Plato's early dialogues frequently concluded inconclusively, without a result. To have talked something through, to have talked about something, some citizen's *doxa*, seemed result enough» (Arendt, 1994: 15-16).

everyone can impute general agreeability; which is why Arendt resorts to Kant's notion of *sensus-communis*. This results in an attempt to anchor the recuperation of the political significance of the Socratic *friendly* exercise of persuasion in the common experience of it «seems to me» that is implicit in aesthetic judgments.

Arendt suggests but never fully elaborates on the relation between *understanding* from the vulnerable position of «it appears to me» and Kant's notion of reflective judgment in either «Introduction into Politics» or «Understanding and Politics»[50]. A more explicit reference to the relation between *phronēsis* and reflective judgment appears latter in «The Crisis of Culture»:

> *That the capacity to judge is a specifically political ability in exactly the sense denoted by Kant, namely, the ability to see things not only from one's own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present; even that judgment may be one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being insofar as it enables him to orient himself in the public realm, in the common world —these are insights that are virtually as old as articulated political experience. The Greeks called this ability φρονμησις, or insight, and they considered it the principal virtue or excellence of the statesman in distinction from the wisdom of the philosopher*[51].

These references show that, since early in her work, Arendt knew that her concept of understanding was somehow anchored in Kant's notion of reflective judgment. She has still to explain why judgment may be «one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being» though, and the explanation comes at hand at last in Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, where she looks for Kant's unwritten political philosophy in his *Third Critique*.

In her lectures, Arendt insists on distinguishing Kant's philosophy from traditional philosophy by claiming that his critique of the cognitive faculties «had actually *dismantled* the whole machinery that had lasted, though often under attack, for many centuries, deep into the modern age». She argues that, in direct opposition to dogmatism and skepticism, the Kantian critical method «recommends itself by its modesty»; and although it does not deny that men might possess «a notion, an idea, of truth for regulating their mental processes», it conceives it possible that they «are not capable, as finite beings, of the truth. (The Socratic: "No man is wise")»[52]. It is at this point that Arendt puts forward her (overstretched) interpretation of the Socratic approach of Kant's critique:

> *To think critically, to blaze the trial of thought through prejudices, through unexamined opinions and beliefs, is an old concern of philosophy, which we may date, insofar as it is a conscious enterprise, to the Socratic midwifery in Athens. Kant was not unaware of this connection. He said explicitly that he wished to proceed «in Socratic fashion» and to silence all objectors «by the clearest proof of [their] ignorance»*[53].

Arendt thus peers Kant's critical philosophy to Socrates' method by locating both *communicability* and *publicity* at the intersection of Kant's critique with

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[50] Arendt, 2005: 168, my emphasis, 1994: 321, my emphasis.
[51] Arendt, 1977: 221, my emphasis.
[52] Arendt, 1982: 28-37.
[53] Arendt, 1982: 36, my emphasis.

Socratic maieutics. Her argument is that «according to Kant and according to Socrates» critical thinking «exposes itself to "the test of free and open examination"». However, Kant's approach to publicity represents an obstacle for any attempt to recover a pluralistic and *isonomic* notion of politics because his conception of freedom to speak and to publish is articulated form the position of «the thinker»[54].

Arendt proposes, then, amending Kant's monophasic communicability from the perspective of the political man via the Socratic *phronimos*. She turns public examination into a multi-account conversation, that is, into a conversation that requires everyone who participates to state how and why he has come to hold a particular opinion (not to provide proofs). For her, in order to be authentically political, communicability requires *critical thinking* and *openness* on the part of *everyone* involved[55]. Thus, she resorts to Socrates once more:

> *What Socrates did when he brought philosophy from the heavens down to earth and began to examine opinions about what went on between men was that he extracted from every statement its hidden or latent implications; that is what his midwifery actually amounted to... Critical thinking to a very large extent consists of this kind of «analysis». This examination, in turn, presupposes that everyone is willing and able to render an account of what he thinks and says... Logon didonai, «to give an account» —not to prove, but to be able to say how one came to an opinion and for what reasons one formed it... The term itself is political in origin: to render accounts is what Athenian citizens asked of their politicians, not only in money matters but in matters of politics. They could be held responsible*[56].

This means that the critical thinking necessary for authentic political speech is more than the testing of the validity of one's own insight; it conveys the will to take a position from which to judge one's opinion vis-à-vis the viewpoint of others. Instead of defending one's own opinion against the standpoint of others, adopting this position entails «"verifying the observations of each by means of all the others"»[57]. Critical thinking, thus, requires validating one's own opinion from a «third view» that is obtainable only after taking into consideration the standpoint of others —which prevents the thinker from deserting the company of his fellow men[58]. This «third view» or «general standpoint» represents standing *equi-vocally* (in a critical position) towards both the others' opinions and also one's own.

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[54] Arendt, 1982: 38-39, 40.

[55] This illustrates the explicit influence of Karl Jaspers' concept of «communication» in Arendt's concept of political action/speech. See Arendt, 1982: 40.

[56] Arendt, 1982: 41.

[57] Arendt, 1982: 42. We thus see that Disch's interpretation of Arendt's use of the phrase «training one's imagination to go visiting» is misleading. Disch suggests that «Arendt's visitor imagines how he or she might feel and think as a character in each of the several stories of events can give rise». However, Arendt is calling for a form of impartiality that does not reproduce the feelings or thoughts of «others» but, rather, reaches a general point of view that is different from both one's own and that of others' (Disch, 1996: 159).

[58] Arendt, 1982: 42. Arendt is taking precaution against the claim that one attains impartial objectivity only by rising to a «higher standpoint». Two examples are: the alienating fallacy of the Archimedean point Arendt refers to in *The Human Condition* and what is represented by the figure of the «umpire» in Kafka's parable «He». See Arendt, 1998, Arendt, 1977: *Preface*.

To be clear, a «general standpoint» from which one's opinion can be equivocally validated and improved is attained only by enlarging one's mind, that is, by «abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to out own judgment», or in other words, by «disregarding what we commonly call self-interest»[59]. Kant's «general standpoint» is not a position that reflects an individual's personal taste, individual preferences, or personal/class interests; by enlarging one's mind, one engages others in public *disregarding* one's «subjective private conditions».

Arendt is suggesting neither a «solitary contemplator»[60] nor a «marginal critic»[61]. Much on the contrary, unlike Kant's monophasic publicity, which pivots around the thinker's point of view, Arendt *de*centers publicity by taking into consideration the *points of view of multiple spectators/actors*, which are, in addition to being social and communicable, also *contestable.* It is true that, as Lisa Jane Disch affirms, «where [Kant] speaks of imputing or expecting agreement, [Arendt] speaks of dispute». But this is not because Arendt shifts the argument from «intersubjectivity to *publicity*»[62]. Instead, Arendt emphasizes the intersubjectivity *in* publicity; in other words, Arendt is giving account of the *other side* of Kant's notion of «expecting agreement». Let me explain. Kant writes thus about the public validity of aesthetic reflective judgments: «The judgment of taste itself does not *postulate* the agreement of everyone (for it is only competent for a logically universal judgment to do this, in that it is able to bring forwards reasons); it only *imputes* this agreement to everyone, as an instance of the rule in respect of which it looks for confirmation, not from concepts, but from the concurrence of others». This means that the intersubjective notion of the beautiful presupposed by the judgment «this rose is beautiful» *imputes* —as it is enunciated— the *concurrence of others*, and thus calls for «confirmation». This call for confirmation is not *postulated* but *imputed*, which means —when seen from the point of view of the «others»— that it is *disputable*. This is why Kant later concludes: «[T]his is all for which he promises himself the agreement of everyone —a claim which, under these conditions, he would also be warranted in making, were it not that he frequently sinned against them, and thus passed an erroneous judgment of taste»[63].

The intersubjective *contestability* that Arendt emphasizes is not grounded, thus, on the fact that each opinion reflects the personal interests of those involved; it presupposes, instead, an *a priori* public sense through which individuals both transcend their subjective conditions (preferences and interests) and are able, once their opinion is expressed, to acquire a position from which to

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[59] Arendt, 1982: 42-43. To be impartial means to disregard self-interest, and thus making possible the application of critical standards to one's own opinion in relation to the others' *doke moi*. This impartiality is not the opposite of Lessing's «taking sides», which means understanding and judging everything in its specificity, that is, «in terms of its position in the world at any given time». Instead, «taking sides» in this sense means *assuming responsibility* in opposition to *being indifferent*. See Arendt, 1968: 8.

[60] See Beiner's *Interpretative Essay* in Arendt, 1982.

[61] See Disch, 1996: 141-171.

[62] Disch, 1996: 151.

[63] Kant, 1952: § 8.

acknowledge the disputability of one's own point of view. This *public sense* is at the center of what Arendt calls Kant's *unwritten* political philosophy.

Arendt's quest for this *public sense* starts by explaining the full implications in the distinction between genius and taste that Kant presents in his «Critique of Aesthetic Judgment». She explains that when Kant affirms that «*genius* is required for the production of art works» and *taste* is required «for judging them, for deciding whether or not they are beautiful objects», the assumption is that «th*e few who are endowed with genius do not lack the faculty of taste*». In other words, Arendt's argument is that judging is *not* an exclusive faculty of «spectators». Much on the contrary, both actors and spectators require a general sense of *taste*, which makes «the ideas *susceptible to being permanently and generally assented to*, and capable of being followed by others, and of an ever progressing culture»[64].

Decentering Kant's monophasic spectator and his privileged position of judgment requires recognizing not only that the spectator is «always involved with other spectators» but also that judging is *not* exclusive of spectators. And although the actor «never sees the meaning of the whole» (which is why the guiding principles of action are both forgiveness and promise[65]), he has to be able to *judge partially*, from his position: the actor «knows only his part or, if he should judge from the perspective of acting, *only the part of the whole that concerns him*»[66]. Arendt understands that in order to expose one's opinion to the test of free and open examination one has to make use of the same public sense that is presupposed in aesthetic judgments in order to make it susceptible to be generally assented. Her intention is never to aestheticize either politics or her concept of understanding; she is interested not on aesthetic judgments but on what makes them possible.

What creates the impression that Arendt is aestheticizing politics is, in part, the intricate explanation she offers to elucidate how is that the common faculty of (reflective) judgment could be based on a «sense» as extremely subjective and incommunicable as taste[67]. According to her, *imagination* is what makes the «sense of taste» (which is individual and incommunicable) suitable for the «enlargement of the mind». Imagination «transform[s] the objects of the objective

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[64] Arendt, 1982: 62, 63, my emphasis.

[65] «The remedy against irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting does not arise out of another and possibly higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself. The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility —of being unable to undo *what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing*— is the faculty of forgiving. The remedy of unpredictability, for the *chaotic uncertainty of the future*, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises». Arendt, 1998: 237, my emphasis.

[66] Arendt, 1982: 63, 77, my emphasis. This exposition of «the actor's partiality» is consistent with Arendt's political interpretation of Lessing's polemicism: the «lack of "objectivity" in Lessing's polemicism... *his forever vigilant partiality*... has nothing whatsoever to do with subjectivity because it is always framed not in terms of the self but *in terms of the relationship of men to their world*, *in terms of their positions and opinions*». Arendt, 1968: 29, my emphasis.

[67] Arendt explains that the sense of taste is private, incommunicable, non-representational, and indisputable («*De gustibus non disputandum est*»). She thus questions: «Why then would taste... be elevated to and become the vehicle of the mental faculty of judgment?». Arendt, 1982: 65, 66.

senses into «sensed» objects, as though they were objects of an inner sense. This happens by reflecting not on an object but on its representation». Arendt claims that only when one reflects on the «sensed object», one speaks «of judgment and no longer of taste»[68]. Here again Arendt's emphasis is on the fact that aesthetic judgments are not expressions of the individual's subjective preferences and interests but of the *individual's participation in taste as a public sense*. This is more evident if one resorts to Kant's distinction between the sense of taste and taste as a public sense which is much clearer than Arendt's explanation: For Kant, *taste* is an *a priori estimate of communicability*, that is, «the faculty of estimating what makes our feeling in a given representation *universally communicable* without the mediation of a concept». In this instance, taste is «not as an organic sense but... a critical faculty in respect of the agreeable generally». This means, for example, that although the subjective judgment «the rose is agreeable» is aesthetic, «it is *not* one of taste but of sense»; for the most important characteristic of a judgment of taste is that it is *reflective*, which means that its imputation of general agreeability does not «spring from concepts» but from a «claim to validity for all men»[69].

Thus, the imputation of general agreeability in a judgment of taste is possible because it appeals to a commonly shared sense that makes it *communicable in contestable terms*. From the perspective of Arendt's argument, the relevant fact is that the public sense that is manifest in every imputation implicit in judgments of taste is *also* manifest in the equivocal validation actualized in presenting one's opinion from a position of «it appears to me». This public sense is what Kant calls *sensus communis*, which he defines in *The Critique of Judgment* as

> *[A] critical faculty which in its reflective act takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgment with the collective reason of mankind, and thereby avoid the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions which could readily be taken for objective, an illusion that would exert a prejudicial influence upon his judgment*[70].

In contrast to *sensus privatus*, Arendt insists, «*sensus communis* is an «extra sense... that fits us into a community»: «One can only "woo" or "court" the agreement of everyone else. And in this persuasive activity one actually appeals to the "community sense"». In other words, when one judges, one judges as a member of a community»[71].

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[68] Ronald's edition of Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, includes a section on *Imagination* that was part of a Seminar she gave on *Kant's Critique of Judgment* during the same Fall of 1970. In these notes Arendt explains the concept of «example» as an analogy of «schema». Kant affirmed, as Arendt quotes, that in cases of reflective judgment «understanding [intellect] is at the service of imagination». This means that, in these cases, schemas do not have a cognitive purpose but are, rather, an «example» liberated from «rules» and «stiff regularity» that allows «the maintenance of a free play of the powers of representation». As Arendt explains, if the «example is rightly chosen» then the «judgment has exemplary validity»; or, in words of Kant: In reflective judgments «I put forward my judgment of taste as an *example* of the judgment of commons sense». Arendt, 1982: 65, 67, 84-85, Kant, 1952: § 22 and the *General Remark on the First Section of the Analytic*, my emphasis)

[69] See Kant, 1952: § 7, § 8, § 40, my emphasis.

[70] Kant, 1952: § 40.

[71] Arendt, 1982: 70, 72. See also Arendt, 1977: 221.

What Arendt is after are the reflexivity that Kantian aesthetic judgment requires and the *sensus communis* it both presupposes and actualizes, not its aesthetic content. Which is why it is a terrible mistake to interpret Arendt's quest for indications of Kant's unwritten political philosophy in his critique of aesthetic judgment as aestheticization of politics. *Sensus communis* —which is presupposed in reflective judgment— makes it possible for a plurality of individuals to *face* the same particular thing, *form their opinion* about it, and *express it* from a position where they can a) impute *general agreeability* to the opinion without applying a universal principle, b) give an account of how and for what reasons they came to be of the opinion, and c) subject it to examination in relation to everyone else's opinion. For Arendt, both the communicability and publicity of opinion (*doxa*) depend on one's ability to «think from the other person's standpoint» which in turn presupposes one's participation in *sensus communis*[72].

As Arendt anchors the recovery of her notion of friendly exercise of persuasion (which she distills from Socratic *maieutics*) in the Kantian notions of *sensus communis* and *enlarged mentality*, her early concept of *understanding* turns into *judging*. She claims that the *sensus communis* implied in reflective judgments (which derive neither from personal preferences nor from logical inferences) is at the center of a form of communicability and publicity that entails the openness of each opinion as well as the accountability of each participant. Political judging is, then, the foundation of an equi-vocal form of interaction among men and between them and the world in which everyone engaged can understand the truth in the other's opinion by understanding how and in what specific manner the common world appears to the other (friendship)[73].

3. Arendt's moral judgment and political judging

As I have exhibited above, throughout her work Arendt presents two different ideal-types of Socrates. On the one hand, Arendt introduces Socrates as an exemplary «moral man» through whom she reformulates Kant's categorical imperative. This reformulation informs Arendt's concept of conscience as the ultimate autonomous source of morality. On the other, she presents Socrates as *phronimos* —in contrast to the philosopher (*sophos*)— whereby she retrieves the experience of the «friendly» articulation of *doxa* as the principle of political action/speech. To do this Arendt recovers Kant's *sensus communis* as the *a priori* of communicability, publicity and contestability, without dragging his concepts of *monological spectator* and *progress* with it.

Arendt's two ideal-types of Socrates correspond to two different concepts of «judgment». On one side, moral judgment is the subjective manifestation of

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[72] «One can communicate only if one is able to think from the other person's standpoint; otherwise one will never meet him, never speak in such a way that he understands. By communicating one's feelings, ones pleasures and disinterested delights, one tells one's *choices* and one chooses one's company». Arendt, 1982: 74

[73] This seems point seems to underlie Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves' claim that «Arendt retained the link between judgment and the world of human affairs, stressed the public and intersubjective dimensions of judgment, and continued to emphasize its political character» Passerin d'Entrèves, 1994: 14.

conscience as the cross-examination of one by one's self. Her claim is that, in a context in which the *voice of God* has been muted and *mores* has been utterly relativized, moral judgment is the expression of non-imperative self-respect. On the other side, political judging is the friendly/equi-vocal understanding the truth in one's opinion that implies understanding how and in what specific manner the common world appears to the other. In this case judging is not subjective because it does not stem out of personal desire or predilection; instead, judging is *inter*subjective because it entails an imputation of general agreeability.

It is important to insist that Arendt's proposal of an active/participatory citizenship is built, precisely, on her notion of political judging and not on her notion of moral judgment. For her, the only instance in which moral judgment may be considered tangentially political is when —in boundary situations— the ability to say «this is wrong» may «prevent catastrophes, at least for *the self*»[74]. Politics is never about preventing catastrophes for one's self, but about the imputation of general agreeability that opinions presuppose.

It is not as if Arendt's concept of political «judging» is flawless. The central challenge in Arendt's definition is that it requires a normative standard while it eschews moral codification. This is initially evident in Arendt's formulation of the two principles that curb action's irreversibility and unpredictability: Forgiveness and promise. Arendt's claim is that (political) action does not require «external» principles but rather includes them in its own actualization. Arendt's intention in this respect is to liberate action from being subjugated to a higher system of norms and values[75]. Nonetheless, forgiveness and promise result insufficient to guarantee the freedom, plurality and *isonomia* that are fundamental for political action/speech.[76] Arendt's recovery of opinion —as an authentic imputation of general agreeability— requires an *ethical position* of *friendship* from which one is able to both understand and take into consideration how the world appear to others. This ethical (not moral) position is summarized in the proposition «it seems to me» (*dokei moi*) that outlines the equivocal understanding implicit in each and every opinion expressed about the world in common. This is precisely what Arendt is after: a new account of politics as a relation *inter pares* that makes possible for a plurality of individuals to *face* the same particular thing, *form their opinion* about it, and *express it* from a position where they can a) impute *general agreeability* without applying a universal principle, b) give an account of how and for what reasons they came to be of the opinion, and c) subject it to examination in relation to everyone else's opinion[77].

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[74] Arendt, 1981: 179-193.

[75] «Here the remedy against the irreversibility and unpredictability of the process started by acting does not arise out of another and possible higher faculty, but is one of the potentialities of action itself» (Arendt, 1998: 236-237).

[76] See in Arendt, 2005: *Introduction into Politics*.

[77] Arendt's «ideal type» of Socrates as «*phronimos*» does not seek to recuperate a «model» of Socratic *philosopher,* but the *equi-vocal experience implied in the Socratic maieutic*. It is not the reenactment of the «gadfly» that Arendt is recommending (although she does not seem opposed to it); she is, instead, trying to recover the political meaningfulness of opinion (*doxa*) from its prolonged philosophical and scientific underestimation. See Villa, 2001: 264, 275, 277, 278, Arendt, 1972: 64.

This (re)new(ed) isonomic and pluralistic account of politics requires to be articulated in narrative terms because it cannot be imposed on the individual's behavior as an external normative framework. In other words, the actualization of Arendt's notion of political action calls for a cultural revolution through which «an attitude that knows how to take care and preserve and admire the things of the world» can be nurtured and fostered.

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